



South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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EOC examines status of student achievement and progress toward 2010 goal

Editor's Note: A pdf copy of the 2010 Goal publication can be found on the EOC website at www.sceoc.org, under "In the News."

Columbia – Eight years following the passage of landmark legislation that set into motion a system of high academic standards, assessments, training, public reporting and assistance, the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) today presented its annual report on South Carolina's effort to reach the 2010 goal. The goal, which was established in 1999, states *"by the year 2010, South Carolina's student achievement will be ranked in the top half of states nationally. To achieve this goal, we must become one of the five fastest improving systems in the country."*

In a unique setting involving legislative leaders in education, as well as the chairpersons and senior executive officers of education agencies, perspectives on the goal were provided from Dr. Ronald Ingle, President, Coastal Carolina University; Dr. Ronald L. Rhames, Vice President for Business Affairs, Midlands Technical College; and Ms. Beth Wright, Superintendent, Florence School District Three. Each stressed that a quality education system is the foundation for a prosperous, economic future in South Carolina.

Alex Martin, EOC Vice-Chairman, presented South Carolina's progress and ranking on measures which a national comparison could be made. The Nation's Report Card, or the National Assessment of Education Progress, shows South Carolina making notable improvements in math and science. On four out of the six NAEP comparisons, South Carolina was one of the five fastest improving systems in the country. Items of note include:

- 4th grade Math – the Nation's Report Card
 - SC ranked 28th in the nation.
 - Five-year improvement second largest jump nationwide.
- 8th grade Math – the Nation's Report Card

- SC ranked 21st in the nation.
- Five-year improvement largest jump nationwide.
- 4th grade Science – the Nation’s Report Card
 - SC ranked 33rd in the nation.
 - Five-year improvement largest jump nationwide.
- 8th grade Science – the Nation’s Report Card
 - SC ranked 30th in the nation.
 - Five-year improvement third largest jump nationwide.

South Carolina’s reading performance, in both the 4th and 8th grades, slipped from 2003. SC ranks 41st in the nation, in a comparison of 4th grade reading average scale scores nationwide. In 8th grade reading, SC ranks 39th nationwide.

Martin discussed the emphasis the committee has placed on reading, identifying it as the most critical area of academic need in South Carolina.

“I cannot overemphasize how critical reading proficiency is to our students,” said Martin. “Without a foundation in reading, we cannot expect our students to succeed in the academic disciplines and in life.”

Martin also presented data regarding SAT and ACT, two college admissions tests given nationwide. Although South Carolina’s five-year improvement on the SAT, reflects a gain of 11 points, SC ranks 49th among states on the SAT and ACT. Sixty-two percent of SC high school graduates took the SAT in 2006, and the state ranks 18th in participation. Comparably, 39 percent of high school graduates took the ACT in 2006.

“We cannot ignore that student performance must improve on college admission tests if we are to meet our goal in South Carolina,” stated Martin. “We owe it to the students of South Carolina who deserve to succeed in an international economy.”

South Carolina ranked in the top half of states nationally in both participation in and passage of Advanced Placement Courses, an “all-time high,” according to Martin. AP courses are recognized nationally for their challenging curricula, and most colleges and universities award college credit to students who score well on AP end-of-course exams. Points in the presentation included:

- SC’s AP participation rank (18th) was determined in a comparison of the percent of 2005 high school graduates who took an AP exam at any point during high school. In 2005, 21.6 percent of those students in SC took an AP exam in high school. Between 2000 and 2005, SC’s rate of participation increased 3.9 points, compared to a nationwide increase of 6.8 percentage points.
- SC’s AP passage rank (20th) was determined in a comparison of the percent of students in the graduating class of 2005 who scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam at any point during high school. In 2005, 12.5 percent of graduates in SC scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam in 2005. Between 2000 and 2005, SC’s passage rate increased 2.6 percentage points, while the nation gained 3.6 points.

Martin also presented data regarding the achievement gap that exists among students of different racial/ethnic groups and different economic status. Stressing that the gaps “remain, perplexing and

persistent,” Martin pointed to comparisons made on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT), Advanced Placement participation and passage, as well as gaps on the SAT and ACT.

Improvement in reducing the gap in performance in PACT English Language Arts occurred between white and African American students, as well as pay and free/reduced price lunch students. The gap between white and African American students on the SAT also decreased 10 points, between 2002 and 2006.

In AP performance, Martin pointed out that the gap between white and African American students has narrowed four points in nine years, while the gap between white and Hispanic students has been eliminated.

Following an informal discussion among participants, Martin stressed the importance of celebrating our accomplishments in South Carolina while remaining relentless in our mission of reaching the 2010 Goal.

Established by the EAA, the EOC is an independent, non-partisan, 18-member legislative committee made up of educators, business persons, and elected officials who serve by virtue of their elected position or by appointment of the legislature or governor. It bears responsibilities for the development and improvement of SC’s educational accountability system and for making recommendations to ensure the continuous improvement of schools.